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ABSTRACT

In response to the Canadian Nurses Association's mandate that a baccalaureate degree be required for all practicing nurses by the year 2000, the Calgary Conjoint Nursing Program (CCNP) was developed by faculty from a 2-year college-based diploma program, a 3-year hospital-based program, and a 4-year university-based program. With initial planning beginning in 1987, approval was granted for a 6-year trial in 1993, although due to budget cuts, the hospital-based program was discontinued. As implemented, the CCNP offers a baccalaureate degree through the University of Calgary, while students who choose the diploma option graduate after 3 years from Mount Royal College. A common fee structure was developed for students attending either institution, while students have access to all library and recreational facilities. Student advising has been an integral component, while provincial reductions in hospital funding have necessitated greater attention to recruitment and retention. In response to workload and communication considerations, a student flow model was developed and a Communications Coordinator was hired. Also, a program advisory committee was established and an outside evaluator was hired. Benefits of the program include better preparation for graduates, increased access to the baccalaureate degree, and a more efficient use of resources, while a major challenge is the need for greater flexibility to accommodate high school students, transfers, and students who already have a degree in another discipline. (HAA)

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WALKING THE TIGHTROPE OF COLLABORATION: THE CHALLENGES

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Biographical Sketch

Kit McRae is the Program Coordinator of the Calgary Conjoint Nursing Program at Mount Royal College in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. She coordinates this program with her counterpart at the Faculty of Nursing, University of Calgary.

Kit has held a variety of administrative positions, including Program Coordinator of the Nursing Diploma Program at Mount Royal College as well as Assistant to the Chair, Nursing and Allied Health Department. She has taught in a three year hospital-based nursing program, a two year nursing program at a college and a newly developed four year baccalaureate nursing program. She received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing form the University of Alberta and her Masters of Arts in Administration and Curriculum from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington.

WALKING THE TIGHTROPE OF COLLABORATION: THE CHALLENGE

Developing a new four year baccalaureate nursing program has created challenges and opportunities for all involved. Recognizing that other collaborative educational programs are emerging across the country, sharing our own unique experience as faculty members may benefit others. This paper describes the history of our collaborative project, some of the issues and challenges encountered, strategies used to facilitate the process and benefits gained.

The Calgary Conjoint Nursing Program (CCNP) is a four year baccalaureate nursing education program which has involved faculty from three nursing programs in Calgary (a two year college-based diploma program, a three year hospital-based diploma program and a four university baccalaureate program). The program was developed in response to the Canadian Nurses Association's mandate that a Baccalaureate Nursing Degree be required for entry to practice in the year 2000.

Predictably, because of the inherent complexities, there has been many frustrations and surprises in developing the new program. The faculty has also experienced satisfaction and pride in achieving, what some have said, an almost insurmountable venture.

History

- In 1987, the faculties of the three participating institutions began to work together to determine faculty support for collaboration to develop a baccalaureate degree in nursing.
- Following a variety of faculty meetings and information sessions over the next year, a proposal was reviewed and approved in principle by all three faculties. Approval was given for more detailed planning and a study was undertaken in 1989 to explore support for and barriers to collaborative nursing education.
- Committees with representation from each of the three institutions continued with detailed planning.
- The formal process of gaining academic approval for the program at both the College and the University was achieved.. Negotiations between Alberta Advanced Education and representatives of the three programs continued. In January 1993 a six year trial period for the Calgary Conjoint Nursing Program was approved, a mere 6 1/2 years from the initial planning!
- Approval of the program was subject to conditions which included offering both a degree and a diploma program.

We now had approval to begin accepting students in the fall 1993 - one program and one curriculum designed and taught by faculty on three different sites!

- With provincial budget cuts came the closure of all the hospital-based schools of nursing across the province. This meant the loss of the Foothills School of Nursing, one of our partners. Budgets needed re-configured with reduced funds, student flow

changed, the administration team restructured and the faculty teaching assignments were reallocated. All of these activities added to the already existing strain.

Admission and Promotion

- The CCNP offers a Degree (BN) which is awarded by the University of Calgary following completion of the fourth year. The students are admitted through the University and, thus, must meet the entrance requirements consistent with University standards. The students completing the Baccalaureate Nursing Degree convocate at the University of Calgary.
- Those that choose a Diploma Option graduate at the end of year three from Mount Royal College.
- Admission and promotion requirements and policies are based on common standards and practices between sites. The Conjoint students who register for courses at the University or the College are subject to the rules of academic and non-academic misconduct of that institution, as outlined in their respective calendars. When differences in policies occur, such as the Student Appeal Process, then the policy is followed on the site where the student is registered.

Student Flow

- Movement of student flow from site to site needed to meet a number of criteria related to estimated budget and preliminary planning. As the head count needs to be maintained at each institution, the student enrollment needs to be equal on each site. It was determined early that the students must register and remain on one site for the entire year.
- Coordinating timetables between Mount Royal College and the University of Calgary has also been a new experience and one that has needed patience in learning the different institutional systems and approaches to timetabling.

Student Concerns

- A common fee structure for student tuition was determined in order to make the program affordable. This means that the students pay the same tuition and fees whether registered at the University or the College.
- CCNP students have access to the library and recreational facilities on each campus. The two student unions groups at both institutions worked together to obtain a blended student union fee which allowed all nursing students to be members of both students' unions with full rights and privileges. This meant that all of our students, regardless of the campus they are attending, have access to the recreational and library facilitates at each site, as well as access to scholarships and bursaries. Operationalizing these privileges resulted in the need to adjust student fees.
- Name tags and photo identification, lab supplies, uniform policies, health and safety policies, exam policies and differential pricing in the two bookstores were only a few of the details that needed attention.

- Over the past four years, there has been an increase in the number of students who have university transfer credit in contrast to those who are admitted directly from high school.
- To meet the students' needs, a 'fasttrack' option has been developed to enable a select group of students to complete their program over a slightly extended semester and exit by December of year three.

Advising

- Program advising has been integral to recruitment, admission and retention throughout the four years. Monitoring of academic progress, provision of significant registration information as well as information about site selection, practice choices, explanations about the program and links to both Registrar's offices have all been part of the advisors' activities. New registration ID numbers for each student needed to be created when they moved from the University of Calgary to Mount Royal College as the registration systems on each site are different.
- As the numbers of students grew, it was recognized that an academic advisor needed to be more available to the students at the college. This past year, an admissions advisor has been employed to work in the nursing department three days a week.The advisor's hours are extended to full time during the peak advising times.
- Both Registrars' agreed to a statement in the calendar stating that the program is in a developmental stage and therefore both Mount Royal College and the University of Calgary reserve the right to make whatever changes are necessary to the content and the hours of instruction of individual nursing courses in the program. This statement has facilitated a number of changes that would not have otherwise been possible.

Recruitment and Marketing

- With the drastic reduction of health care funding and numerous hospital bed closures, a reduction of applicants has necessitated greater attention to recruitment. A committee was struck to address the needs of recruitment, admission and retention. Their activities have resulted in a modest increase in enrollment of our fourth class.
- Student retention continues to be a challenge and is an area which is requiring specific ongoing planning.

Workload Considerations

- From the beginning, it was necessary to frame workload assignments using the distinct natures of the various institutions. We also needed to adjust to living with the philosophical differences surrounding academic freedom and what this means to the University and the College and what this means to the curriculum.
- The student flow model was based on a commitment to an integrated teaching model to maximize the most effective use of faculty resources. Workload on both sites has been considered in the context of joint teaching responsibilities based on expertise . This model necessitates cross-site and cross curriculum teaching by faculty.

- It is important to point out that the faculty teaching assignments remain the jurisdiction of the site employing the faculty. The workload needs to recognize and conform to the requirements of the collective agreement for each site. The difference in expectations in teaching loads and responsibilities has created some tension and challenges between the institutions.
- Some of the ongoing teaching workload issues center around large verses small classes, physical resources on each site and number and preparation of available faculty. Faculty are at high risk of burnout. Course development, increased marking due to larger classes and travel time between sites has been costly not only in time but also in energy.
- Part-time faculty are hired by the institution which offers that part of the program. As there are some differences in pay scale for part-time faculty between sites, each institution has taken responsibility for hiring for specific courses. This has provided consistency at least across courses.
- Collaboration is also been needed in cross-site committees to ensure continuity and consistency of the curriculum and program for students..

Communication

- Coordinating teaching at two sites and keeping in touch with the entire student body is a considerable challenge. The complexity of organizing and managing the large number of students and full and part faculty on two sites requires special attention.
- A Communications Coordinator was hired to assist in communicating amongst the various committees and amongst the sites..
- At regular intervals, townhall meetings with students at all levels on both sites provide opportunities for faculty and students to communicate with each other.
- Communications has been, and continues to be one of the biggest challenges as we move through the development of the program..

Program Governance

- The Program Heads from the institutions serve as the Administrative team responsible and accountable for the ongoing planning and operation of the program.
- One of the biggest challenges faced has been the facilitation of the decision making process. There is a lack of willingness on the part of the faculty to delegate authority from the Full Faculty Committee to other committees within the reporting structure.
- Some of the challenges arise out of combining three distinct nursing traditions. The challenges that faced us were to integrate the procedures, the services, the traditions of each institution. Some notable differences in philosophical beliefs of individual faculty also became evident.

Curriculum/Program Design

- In creating a new curriculum, the faculty dealt with challenges which included that of dealing with the grieving process for the loss of existing programs, feelings of loss of control as the curriculum was taken over by a larger group, buying into the philosophy

of the new curriculum and worry about the type of graduate we were producing. This has created some tensions, which has resolved, in part, over time.

- Throughout the past 3 1/2 years, there has been considerable temptation to fix and repair the curriculum as we taught the program for the first time. We made a conscious decision not to make major changes until the program has been offered at least once.

Program Advisory Committee

- A Program Advisory Committee, with nursing and public representatives across the health care sector, meets twice a year. This committee provides advice regarding developments in health care that impact the curriculum, as well as provide advise about the curriculum.
- This forum is also used to explain the new program to the stakeholders.

Course/Program Evaluation

- An outside evaluator has been hired to provide an annual formative evaluation. The information gathered will provide assistance in program development and implementation as well as identify program outcomes. The summative evaluation information at the end of the six year pilot will assist the government in decision making regarding program continuation.

Benefits

The anticipated benefits of this new program are now being realized:

- Graduates of the program will be prepared to work in a variety of health care settings including tertiary care.
- Graduates are prepared for practice in the twenty-first century.
- A greater number of students have access to baccalaureate nursing education.
- Program delivery costs have been conserved by more effective use of faculty, physical and financial resources.
- There is more rationale and effective use of scarce clinical resources.

Ongoing challenges

- One of the identified major challenges, among others, that face us is that of introducing greater flexibility into the program for high school students, transfer students and those students who already have a degree from another discipline.

The decision to work together to develop a new nursing curriculum to prepare graduates for the future has involved risk-taking, uncertainty, give and take, tolerance and collaboration. There is much more work to be done as we now begin to evaluate and re-develop the curriculum and program. Each one of the faculty needs to be recognized for their tireless commitment to the program. The challenges have been and continue to be a reflection of the highly complex situation in offering a new curriculum of high quality on two sites and in conjunction with another faculty.